

PUPPET PLAY

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Puppet Play

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God - A big puppet with a golden beard.

Devil - A wrung-out tired doll.

Gabriel - A fat dummy with grey disheveled hair, a bunch of keys and a long sword on wheels.

Saint - A stuffed doll with shiny cheeks.

Sinner - A thin, wiry excitable puppet.

(The Stage: On one side is the entrance to Heaven. On the other side, the entrance to Hell.)

God: I've got it good. I'm God. I do what I want. And I don't do what I don't want. No one can tell me nothin. No one can do me nothin. First, because I'm so mighty. Second, because I'm eternal. Third, because I'm first. Before me nobody thought of being first and creating worlds and people and animals and birds and fish and worms. I am such a very clever fellow. (*Shouts into Hell.*) Hey, you! Devil! (*Aside.*) He doesn't hear. Better throw a thunderbolt. (*Lightning.*)

Devil: I come to tell you God on high,
To hear your word, I do draw nigh.

God: Who's great?

Devil: You.

God: Who's wise?

Devil: You.

God: Enough. Now let's get down to business. Did you overturn that wagonload of Jews that were going to see the Rebbe?

Devil: No.

God: Why not?

Devil: It was like this. I lay in wait for the wagonload of Jews, waiting for them to reach the peak of Sassoover Mountain just by a deep abyss, and then I'll overturn the wagon and kill the lot of them. I stalked them and stalked them.

God: Yes.

Devil: And I lurked and lurked.

God: Yes. . .

Devil: And when they reached the peak of Sassoover Mountain. . . You know where Sassoover Mountain is, God.

God: Yes, I know.

Devil: It's a very tall mountain. I thought, just right here is the very place to overturn this wagonload of Jews. So what do they do? All of a sudden, they climb out of the wagon and start reciting their afternoon prayers.

God: Well, there you have it. Just try getting mixed up with Jews. . . (*Different*) Well, it's a lost cause. You can go now. But don't forget to take a sack of headaches for Philadelphia. For an hour and a half already, they've been going around without headaches. And take a smaller bunch of headaches for the children. Don't forget.

Devil: (*Starts to go.*)

God: (*Calls him back.*) Hey, Devil!

Devil: Yes?

God: Who's great?

Devil: You.

God: Who's wise?

Devil: You.

God: Who's mighty?

Devil: You.

God: Who's eternal?

Devil: You.

God: Remember. Don't forget. I'm the greatest God of all. Besides me, there are no Gods whatsoever on earth. Only me.

Devil: I know! I know!

God: You don't know. You're only saying you know. How do you know?

Devil: You told me so, yourself.

God: Aha! That's true. I told him so myself. I tell everybody. I have no shame. Nobody can do me nothin. If I feel like it, I'll give you a smack. (*Does it.*) What can you do?

Devil: Nothing.

God: And if I want, I'll give you another smack. What can you do? (*Does it.*)

Devil: Nothing.

God: Good. Now you can go. Meanwhile, I'll clamber down to Fifth Heaven and see if they have enough storm clouds for tomorrow. (*Off.*)

Gabriel: (*Appears.*) Kind of quiet in Hell today. (*Calls into Hell.*) Hey you! Have you heard? Buncha guys stole the Devil's tar pots. Now he's got nothin to boil them in so they're sitting around playing 21. Hey! Take another card! Don't stick with such a low hand. Oops. Too much. Too bad! (*Yawns.*) They should supply yarmulkes for my buddies. They're afraid to sit around without yarmulkes, a demon'll get 'em. (*Calls.*) Huh? How many yarmulkes? I'd like to know what they do with so many yarmulkes for God's sake. Unless they eat them. (*Breaks*

into a big grin.) In Goyish Heaven they have such a good time. Sassy fellows dancing with shiksese. It's lively. Here they sit around talking about food. What are we going to eat? When are we going to eat? Will it be fresh? I'd like to know what kind of people they are. What? I'm going to serve them canned food? They're afraid - God forbid - they'll get sick and die from it? Buncha boring Jews, for God's sake. But they gobble Leviathan, they gnaw Giant Ox, and swill the Wine of Creation. Bunch of guzzlers, the devil take 'em. I've never seen the like. (*Tired.*) I'll go in and lie down in Heaven for a bit. I'm sleepy. Oy, it's boring here.

God's voice: Hey, Gabriel!

Gabriel: (*Trembling with fear.*) His voice! (*Subservient.*) What do you need, God?

God: Who's great?

Gabriel: You.

God: Who's mighty?

Gabriel: You.

God: Who's eternal?

Gabriel: You.

God: How do you know?

Gabriel: You told me so yourself.

God: That's correct.

Gabriel: All day long. All day long. He bores us with these stupid questions. And we have to answer. What can you do? He's in charge. Ech. God help me if I can get out of here. (*Off.*)

(*We hear the voice of an anguished soul from hell.*)

Saint and Sinner: (*Both in shrouds.*)

Sinner: I think I'm hearing voices from Hell.

Saint: (*Hopefully.*) Well, of course it's a little better in Heaven than in ...

Sinner: I beg you, Reb Shakhne, say a good word for me. In life we were neighbors, lived right next door, and we both died the same fire. The same smoke that choked you choked me. The whole house burned down and sadly, we couldn't get out.

Saint: Sure. Sure. We can say a good word for you. Why not? It's a good deed to help out a fellow Jew.

Sinner: Reb Shakhne, have mercy on me. I am a sinful man. (*Different.*) You've got it good, Reb Shakhne. Your whole life, you mortitified your flesh, kept all the fasts. Never got into money trouble. Lived with an ugly wife. But me? What will I do? I played games of chance, sinned with beautiful women, played cards, drank wine, rode in coaches. Oy! I have sinned! I have sinned! (*Pleading.*) Help me beat my breast, Reb Shakhne!

Saint: I hardly have the strength. But since you ask. (*Gives him a blow and another blow and another blow.*)

Gabriel: (*Enters.*) Why are you hitting this guy in the chest?

Saint: He asked me to. He's a sinner.

Gabriel: A sinner? And what are you?

Saint: I'm a saint. Perhaps you're the Heavenly Gate Keeper?

Gabriel: Yes.

Saint: Is this way in to Heaven here?

Gabriel: Yes. But what's your hurry? Maybe you don't have time?

Saint: What do you mean? For 48 years I mortified my flesh. Kept the all the fasts. Lived with an ugly wife.

Gabriel: (*Sharp, angry.*) And who told you to?

Saint: I was protecting my soul.

Gabriel: Soul. Soul. Who needs souls these days? Souls are no longer in fashion. Everyone wants to get rid of them. These days people hate useless baggage. Souls are too heavy and too expensive. You can get along fine without them.

Sinner: (*Delighted.*) Really?

Saint: I beg you. Don't hold me up. I want to enter Heaven.

Gabriel: (*Cold. Takes a pinch of snuff.*) A nice piece of Leviathan, huh? A fat hunk of Giant Ox, huh? A stiff slug of the Wine of Creation, huh?

Saint: No, not that. God knows, my stomach can't digest anything.

Gabriel: So then, you came here for the cure?

Saint: No, not that. I came to sit in the radiance of the Divine Presence.

Gabriel: The Divine Presence. The Divine Presence. (*Sings.*)
Oh! It's boring,
Oy! It's boring,
It bores us one and all.
And me, too.

Sinner: (*To Saint.*) Say a good word for me, Reb Shakhne. I beg you.

Saint: (*To Gabriel.*) Let him into Heaven, too.

Gabriel: What do you mean, "him, too"? You're already so sure you're going to Heaven?

Saint: What do you mean, am I so sure? For 48 years, I mortified my flesh. Lived with an ugly wife.

Gabriel: (*Angry.*) Shut up! Stand aside. We're about to draw lots.

Sinner: (*His face lights up.*) Really?

Saint: What do you mean, draw lots?

Gabriel: It's our custom here. Once upon a time we used to do bookkeeping. We kept accounts. But God realized it was too expensive, so he brought in a new system: lots. When people die and show up here, God holds out his hand with the corners of two handkerchiefs. One has a knot in it. If you pick the one with the knot, you go to Hell. If not, you go to Heaven. (*Yawns.*) What's the difference?

Saint: For this I mortified my flesh for 48 years and lived with an ugly wife?

Gabriel: (*Impatient.*) Idiot. Stand aside. God's busy now. He's lighting the moon. He'll be finished soon. (*Calls.*) Hey God! We've got two customers. (*Quieter.*) Terrify them a bit.

(*Sound of thunder.*)

Gabriel: Throw a couple of thunderbolts. Scare them out of their souls.

(*We see thunderbolts. God's giant hands appear in the darkness. They waver, flutter, with two handkerchiefs.*)

Saint: (*Draws the knot.*)

Gabriel: You, Reb Shakhne, are going to Hell. God Bless ya. You should have had the sense not to live with your own wife. And you, Reb Sinner, if you would, this way, please. Straight to Heaven. (*Sinner goes to Heaven. Gabriel watches, shakes his head pityingly.*)

God's Voice: Who's great?

Gabriel: (*Terrified.*) You.

God's Voice: Who's wise?

Gabriel: You.

God's Voice: Who's mighty?

Gabriel: You.

God's Voice: Who's eternal?

Gabriel: You. You - You. You.

(God's Voice falls silent. Gabriel stands tired and bored. Looks at his clumsy hands and feet and doesn't know what to do with himself. Finally shuffles towards Heaven.)

Gabriel: *(While exiting. Indicates the stage, which the two Jews have departed.)* Who can envy them? *(Pause. Indicates the theater audience.)* And who can envy you? *(Pause. Very sad.)* And who can envy me!

(Curtain)